

Having worked in the recreational fishing and boating industry for over a decade, I have used and fished from many different trailer boats and been involved in a lot of new boat tests.

WHAT MAKES A TOP FISHING BOAT?

BY MATHEW HEWETSON

Often I get asked which boat is the best for fishing or what would I buy?

To be honest, there are several factors which make a good fishing boat and every skipper prefers different things for their ideal boat set-up. I prefer to look for a boat that offers more cockpit space for casting lures from, so a roof isn't my first requirement and a centre console is just fine.

However, there are a few key things to look for when deciding and with so many local trailer boat makers in Godzone, we are lucky that we have such good quality boats to choose from.

Here we profile four key types of trailer boat builds; Alloy, Alloy Pontoon, Fibreglass and Polyethylene Thermoplastic. We have then spoken to four experienced Godzone boat manufacturers, with interesting comments from actual boat owners who help provide their experiences using these boats.

Senator Boats Alloy Pontoon Design

Details

- Based:** Napier, Hawkes Bay
- Dealers:** Dealership network in 9 locations in Godzone
- Models:** 20 / From 4m inshore 4.5-5.5m Cuddy's / 5.8-11m Hard Tops

We spoke to new owner Grant Simmonds from Senator Boats on when Senator was launched and why was the pontoon design used, which Senator are famous for?

Senator was launched in 1996, by "hard core fisherman" Wayne McKinley. Wayne had been building boats for family and

a few friends but, a local boat yard wanted one, then another and it just grew from there.

The first boat was a 5.5m pontoon. The pontoon style was chosen for stability, safety (incredible buoyancy) and Senator, being an innovative company, broke new ground by bringing a new style of pontoon boat to the market.

They have a variable dead rise hull and deeper V compared to other pontoon-designed boats, and they are definitely one of the better-looking pontoon boats on the market.



The cockpit is large and uncluttered, with plenty of rod / tackle storage along the sides.



Many Senators are used by commercial operators such as Epic Adventures who have also recently ordered a new RH770 for their fleet.

We are very proud of our variable dead-rise hull shape that we pioneered in the 90's and the shape of our pontoons are also unique. Developed in the waters here off the Hawkes Bay coast, which can be very rough; there is no shelter or protection here, so the boat has to perform in the roughest of conditions.

We have an 18-deg dead-rise at the transom and then forward at the shoulders we increase that to 26 deg. The buoyancy safety comes from 4/5 large sealed chambers (depending on model) that form part of an incredibly strong structure that is virtually unsinkable.

Senator boats also have a clever fuel breathing system that reduces fumes and allows boat to be stored on an angle.

Senators are "bullet proof", these are seriously tough and stable boats. They only use reputable marine grade aluminium plate. Because of this, many of their boats are in survey and are often the first choice for many commercial charter companies such as Epic Adventures.

All the Senator models are built to survey standards so the boat owner can decide if they want to have the formal stamp of approval.

The cockpit vs. cabin space ratio is a trade-off for fishing space for all boats, what do you consider/allow for this in your boats?

The Senator mid-size boats RH580-650 have had quite some optimisation over the years to get this balance about right for "fishability" vs shelter.

For the larger trailer boats, there are two variations offered on all main models 690 and above. This enables customers to have the choice to go longer or shorter on both deck space or cabin.

Variations from this can be accommodated in our custom build process. It really comes back to having a good understanding on how each boat owner intends to use their new boat.



The RH650 has a good balance that is about right for "fishability" vs. shelter.

What practical fishing considerations do you incorporate into your design? i.e. cockpit space, rod holders etc

It's all about being practical, we pack in loads of storage space, the more rod holders the better! Designing a clear deck space for easy wash-down. Also taking time to think about your ideal transom layout i.e.; live bait tanks, bait-board set up, tuna tubes etc.

Can boat buyers sit down to customise their own boat before production starts?

Yes, this is a major point of difference with Senator, we don't just push products all the same out to the market based solely on our ideas. Everyone uses their boat for a different reason, having the capability to tailor the boat to each boat owner's needs is very important, especially for experienced sports fishermen.

They have a clear idea on what they want and we make the boat just how they like. It is also important to remember your budget when customising a boat to your needs. It helps to think about what is important to you and the features that you may be happy to do without.

For example, we see a lot of advanced fishermen not wanting to spend money on

paint on the inside working areas of their aluminium boat (as it gets knocked around and chipped anyway) they often choose to spend their money wisely and instead of going for paint, they may decide to upscale their fish finder or motor package instead.

Another important method, is to use as the standard package as a base, then only change the things that are important to the boat owner. This keeps

the cost down and ensures proven performance.

At Senator, we have very experienced managers and builders (that are seriously into fishing too) that are able to work through the customisation process step by step.

Senator also builds a range of non-pontoon boats known as "Typhoon" these are also tough no nonsense, stable and soft riding plate boats.



OWNER: Tony Beethem, based in Auckland

MODEL: "Entourage" RH 860 with inboard Hyundai diesel.

FISHES: All over the North Island; from day trips out from Auckland to the back of Gt Barrier for bluenose covering over 100 miles, trips up to The Three Kings and recently to Waihou Bay to catch bluefin tuna.

COMMENTS: Tony has owned

over 20 boats, including a Senator 4m centre console prior to getting the RH 860 nearly two years ago. Tony commented "I think their build quality is exceptional and I'm so impressed with it, we are considering upgrading to a larger model." He likes that he can sit down with Senator and customise the boat before production starts. Tony advised "it has been the best all round boat I have owned and does everything I need."

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